

*Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on National Park Centennial Bills
August 2, 2007*

Today we will hear testimony on two important bills that have much in common: they both seek to commemorate the upcoming centennial of the National Park Service and to prepare the National Park System for its second century. I am pleased that there is bipartisan interest in recognizing this important anniversary and, more important, a common desire to invest in the future of our national treasures.

We have three panels of distinguished witnesses. I want to welcome the panelists and thank them for joining us.

Established in 1916, the National Park Service has grown to protect and interpret nearly 400 spectacular places across the country. Our National Parks welcome more than 270 million visitors each year and are a source of enormous pride for all Americans. Our National Park Service, which employs more than 20,000 passionate and professional employees, is a world leader in conservation and interpretation.

As the centennial approaches, there is consensus – among policy-makers and the American people – that this milestone must be viewed as an opportunity to recommit ourselves to building a stronger, more diverse, better trained and better equipped National Park Service.

In February, the Administration proposed legislation to increase funding for the NPS over the next decade in recognition of the centennial. Two of our colleagues on the Committee – Subcommittee Ranking Member Bishop and Full Committee Ranking Member Young – have introduced that legislation, by request, as H.R. 2959.

H.R. 2959 establishes a challenge fund for private sector cash donations and provides a mandatory federal match of up to \$100 million dollars. Money from the challenge fund, authorized for 10 years, would be spent on signature projects or programs, broadly defined as any project or program identified by the Director of the National Park Service as one that will help prepare the National Parks for another century of conservation, preservation and enjoyment.

In my view, however, the Administration proposal is incomplete – most notably in that it lacks a way to pay for the increased spending it proposes. Further, I remain troubled by the incentives created by the bill’s matching requirement.

Therefore, Chairman Nick Rahall and I have introduced H.R. 3094, which also authorizes mandatory spending expected to total \$100 million a year for ten years. Our legislation builds on the Administration proposal by establishing six specific areas within which this increased funding is to be spent. These areas include education in the parks, diversity programs, an environmental leadership initiative, professional development, resource protection and capital improvements. This mix of funding priorities – investing in education, bricks and mortar and human capital – will insure our parks and park employees can meet the challenges of the next 100 years successfully.

H.R. 3094 provides this new spending without requiring private matching funds. While we recognize the critical role private giving has played in creating and sustaining the National Park System, we remain concerned about the ever-increasing reliance on private funds. This bill encourages

private giving but makes absolutely certain that NPS spending priorities are determined by the Congress and the Administration without regard to which projects might, or might not, be most attractive to private donors.

Finally, H.R. 3094 is paid for. We are certainly open to discussing the funding mechanism but we must be clear – any centennial proposal must have an offset if it is to move forward.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses for their presence here today and I look forward to their testimony. With that, I will turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, for any opening comments he may have. Mr. Bishop?